



VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes
September 17, 2013

I. Call to Order – Don Beasley, Chairman

The September 17, 2013, meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission was called to order by Don Beasley, Chairman, at 10:03 a.m. The meeting was held at the Southeast LA War Veterans Home, 4080 West Airline Highway, Reserve, Louisiana. The pledge of allegiance was led by Ms. Lonnnette, followed by prayer by Mrs. Wilkewitz. Roll was called by Mr. Beasley. All nine Commissioners were present.

Commissioners: Don Beasley, Russell Henry, William Detweiler, Richard Garner, Carroll Knott, Sulanda Lonnnette, Rudy Bourg, Lee Richard, and Precilla Wilkewitz.

LDVA Staff: David LaCerte, Interim Secretary; Mike McNaughton, Veterans Outreach Director; Dustin Guy, Human Resources Director; Stephanie Wade, Chief Fiscal Officer; Bradley Lemoine, Internal Auditor; and Charmagne Scott, Executive Assistant.

Guests: Mrs. Silvana Bourg, Mrs. Carrie Richard, and Mrs. Betty Garner

II. Introduction of New Board Member

Mr. Beasley welcomed Mr. William “Bill” Detweiler, who was appointed to the Commission in June. Mr. Detweiler is an attorney, Past National Commander of The American Legion, and Military/Veterans’ Affairs consultant with the National World War II Museum in New Orleans.

III. Approval of Minutes

The February 23, 2013, meeting minutes had been distributed to the Commissioners for review prior to the September 17th meeting. A motion was made by Mr. Richard, seconded by Ms. Lonnnette, to approve the minutes as distributed. The motion passed.

IV. Division Reports

Human Resources/Fiscal. Mr. Guy reviewed a handout showing the vacancies within the Administrative program and the five State Veterans Homes (SVHs) as of September 6, 2013. Vacancies in the Administrative program totaled 15, which include four positions at the new Southeast LA Veterans Cemetery in Slidell (opening in 2014). Vacancies at the SVHs totaled 15. There were no vacancies at the Monroe home. Mr. Guy also

reported that the Department of State Civil Service will be conducting a full Human Resources audit in November. Mr. Bourg questioned if there would be another opportunity to request a reallocation for the Veterans Assistance Counselors (VACs) during the audit. Secretary LaCerte responded that there is an approximate wait time of two years before LDVA can resubmit a request for reallocation.

Ms. Wade reviewed the standard handout of the department's FY 2013-2014 operating budget. The total budget (including the SVHs) was \$58,182,213. As of September 5, 2013, approximately 21.2% (\$12,320,985) had been expended. There was an increase of \$800,000 within the LDVA budget due to an Operations/Maintenance grant from the federal VA for site upgrades at the Northwest LA Veterans Cemetery. Secretary LaCerte noted the budget for the Southeast LA Veterans Home was higher than the other homes because the centralized pharmacy division is housed within that facility. In closing comments, Ms. Wade stated all spending was on target as budgeted.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Henry, to accept the Human Resources/Fiscal reports as presented. The motion passed.

Internal Auditor. Secretary LaCerte officially introduced Mr. Lemoine to the Commissioners as LDVA's Internal Auditor. Mr. Lemoine previously worked at the Louisiana Legislative Auditor's Office. Via handout, Mr. Lemoine briefed on projects and audits conducted and/or completed since being hired in March 2013, including development of an Internal Audit policy and procedure manual, a risk assessment to prioritize audit areas, and a review of the SVHs care and maintenance billing processes. A department-wide payroll audit is currently being conducted.

A motion was made by Mr. Henry, seconded by Mr. Richard, to accept the Internal Auditor's report as presented. The motion passed.

State Veterans Homes. Secretary LaCerte briefed on recently hired personnel. Mr. Cleveland Obey was hired as the new administrator of the Southeast LA Veterans Home. Mr. Oliver Bernard has been hired as an admissions liaison for the SVHs.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Ms. Lonnette, to accept the SVHs report. The motion passed.

State Cemeteries. Secretary LaCerte reported the budgets for the cemeteries are in good shape. A handout submitted by Central LA Veterans Cemetery staff showed the number of burials for FY 2013 totaled 98, and the current number of burials to date for FY 2014 totaled 14. The Caddo Parish Commission has raised funds to erect a monument at the Northwest LA Veterans Cemetery in Keithville. An artist's rendering is currently been done. Seed money for the Northeast Louisiana Veterans Cemetery project has been placed in the State Capital Outlay budget. The project will be located in Rayville on property to be donated by the Franklin family.

A motion was made by Mr. Knott, seconded by Ms. Lonnette, to accept the State Cemeteries report as presented. The motion passed.

Troops to Teachers. Via handout, Secretary LaCerte briefed on the Troops to Teachers report for the 4th quarter (April 1, 2013 through June 30, 2013). No candidates were hired by the public school systems, but an increase is anticipated over the next couple of quarters. The Executive Assistant position is currently vacant and is expected to be filled in the near future. The incumbent resigned due to extended medical issues.

A motion was made by Mr. Richard, seconded by Mr. Bourg, to accept the Troops to Teachers report as presented. The motion passed.

Contact Assistance. A handout submitted by Mr. Al Leger, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Benefits, noted new VACs hired for the parish offices in Ouachita, Caddo, Calcasieu, and the Northeast LA Veterans Home; and a new Para-legal Counselor and Administrative Clerk hired in the Claims Office. Yurie Crockett, former Vernon Parish VAC, was promoted to director of the Central LA Veterans Cemetery. Charles “Chuck” Davison, former Calcasieu Parish VAC, was promoted to Southwest Regional Manager. The service offices in Winn, Jackson, and Acadia Parish remain unmanned due to budget cuts. VACs from nearby parishes are currently providing service to these offices.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Henry, to accept the Contact Assistance report as presented. The motion passed.

Public Relations/Marketing. Secretary LaCerte stated Robin Keller, Communications Director, and Amy Burris, Deputy Chief of Staff, were attending a VA Communicators Conference in San Antonio, Texas. He briefed on the PR/Marketing handout submitted by Ms. Keller, which noted the dedication of the AMVETS Carillon Tower at the Central LA Veterans Cemetery on August 28; an application submitted on August 21 to the federal VA requesting grant funding for the Northeast LA Veterans Cemetery; and the construction progress of the Southeast LA Veterans Cemetery in Slidell. Copies of letters from Secretary LaCerte were also provided to the Commissioners regarding requests for support from the state VA directors concerning the recent policy change by the US Congressional Budget Office which classifies leases for VA outpatient clinics and its potential negative impact on the veteran population nationwide that receive healthcare at these clinics. If the policy remains unchanged, the lease for the current VA clinic in Lafayette could be lost, and new VA healthcare construction projects planned for Lafayette and Lake Charles would be indefinitely delayed. Secretary LaCerte commented on his disappointment with USDVA Secretary Shinseki in that he did not address the Acadiana veteran community on the status of the Lake Charles and Lafayette clinics as promised during his recent visit to New Orleans.

Secretary LaCerte also commented on an internal memorandum forwarded to all LDVA staff giving direction on how to handle requests to file claims for same-sex spousal benefits.

A motion was made by Mr. Henry, seconded by Mr. Richard, to accept the Public Relations/Marketing report as presented. The motion passed.

V. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting date will be scheduled after the new Secretary officially begins employment (October 1).

VI. Other Matters

- Secretary LaCerte commented on the appointment of former US Congressman Rodney Alexander as LDVA’s new Secretary, effective October 1. He will return to his position as Deputy Secretary/Executive Counsel.
- Mr. Henry announced that Mr. Jim Jackson of Lake Charles was elected the new State Commander for The American Legion for 2013-2014. Mr. Detweiler also commented on the upcoming visit of The American Legion’s National Commander to New Orleans.
- Ms. Lonnette stated her reappointment to the Commission was still pending. If not reappointed, she expressed her appreciation of having served veterans in this position for the past years.

VII. Adjournment

There being no further business to be brought before the Veterans Affairs Commission, a motion was made by Mr. Richard, seconded by Mr. Henry, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 11:15a.m.

/s/ Don A. Beasley, Chairman

/s/ David LaCerte, Secretary

12/03/2013

Date of Approval

Minutes submitted by Charmagne Scott, Executive Assistant. Copies of all handouts are filed with the Commission minutes.